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ABSTRACT

Many research questions concering dissemination of educational innovations remain unanswered. We know that dissemination is in itself a science; our strategy is based on the belief that successful adoption of an innovation requires certain generic skills distinctly different from the skills related to a specific innovation. We are examining decision-making processes in school districts and state education departments to develop a change capability that can initiate and sustain educational improvements from the district level to the building level. To accomplish this aim, the following strategies have been utilized: establishment of criteria to ensure commitment and understanding about R&D products as instructional systems; development of training programs for administrators, teachers, and school district central office personnel; establishment of demonstration centers with national representation; development of a data network and feedback system that permits the monitoring of schools; and inclusion of state education agencies and central office administrators in the development of a capability for introducing and maintaining educational innovations. (Author/JG)

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BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

FOR THE

DISSEMINATION OF INNOVATIONS

by

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Presented at

CEDaR COMMUNICATIONS GROUP WORKSHOP
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Introduction

There is clearly a need to expand the current level of knowledge about the installation of educational innovations. Although considerable efforts over the past thirty years have produced a quantity of theoretical research, there is still a paucity of practical know-how as to the implementation of innovative practices into schools. Transfusing schools with new and creative practices requires a carefully engineered approach - one that considers not only the efficiency of the proposed innovation and the effectiveness of the strategies employed, but also the impact of the change process on the people involved over a long period of time. Building relationships and understanding roles and responsibilities between state agencies, local school districts and the individual school principal is a key ingredient in the dissemination of innovations.

The capability of schools to improve the quality of education is constrained by pressures being exerted on public education today. The prevailing accountability, that is, the competency crisis, is symptomatic of the public frustration over the demonstrated low productivity of our educational system. School bond issues are still having their difficulties, more are voted down than are approved.[1]

Indicative of the frustration is the observation that "spending almost three times as much per student doesn't seem to have improved the effectiveness of the system or the quality of the end product appreciably."[2]

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[1] Gallup, George H. "Fourth Annual Gallup Poll of Public Attitudes Toward Education" in Kappan. September, 1972 (pp. 33-46).

[2] Haggerty, Patrick E., Chairman of Texas Instruments, Inc. in a speech before the Dallas Independent School District entitled, "Education, Work and Productivity." Dallas, Texas. February 24, 1972. (p. 13).

The frank admission that "five years and five billion dollars after Title I was passed, we still have not learned how to break the cycle of under-achievement..."[3] is a statement guaranteed not to silence the growing demands from citizens for better results.

The Ford Foundation's Comprehensive School Improvement Project focused on ways and means to make school systems adaptable, flexible, and open to change so that they could make good use of innovative schemes that had already been developed.[4] An important implication that emerges from this study is the fact that a "monolithic" American education system is a myth. In today's pluralistic society, education must respond to the inherent individual differences of the population or else face the increased intensity of public criticism and further loss of stature.

Although the introduction of innovations and the area of educational change has been studied extensively, more must be learned about the ways in which change can be effected so that a change "technology" can offer practical assistance to the "firing line" educators who are dealing with the complexities of education on a daily basis.

A study of the adoption of educational innovations produced by Richard Carlson in 1965 challenged a number of maxims. For example, he found that superintendents who were most inquisitive about new techniques were not always likely to be more innovative.[5] Richer school districts were

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[4]"A Foundation Goes to School -- The Ford Foundation Comprehensive School Improvement Program, 1960-1970." New York: Ford Foundation. November, 1972 (p. 3).

[5]Carlson, Richard O. Adoption of Educational Innovations. Eugene: Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, University of Oregon, 1965 (p. 57).

not necessarily more prone to innovate.[6] Further, Carlson was unable to discover a single satisfactory measure as to why some innovations were more successful in gaining acceptance than others.[7]

Orlosky and Smith examined major educational changes over a period of 75 years. Each of the 63 innovations studies was assigned one of the following categories: "1" A change that has not been implemented in the schools and would be difficult to locate in any school system; "2" A change that has not been accepted as a frequent characteristic of schools but has left a residue that influences educational practice; "3" A change that has been successfully installed and is sufficiently present so that instances of the change are obvious; "4" A change that has successfully been installed and has permeated the educational system.[8]

Forty-four of the innovations were developed before 1950, and of these, twenty-two were categorized as "4" and ten were placed in category "3". Nineteen post-1950 innovations were studied with the following results: only <u>one</u> (Special Education) placed in category "4" and thirteen were categorized as "3". This study has numerous specific conclusions, but the major findings were (1) that it takes a long time for new practices to get into schools, and (2) that no one is systematically building a knowledge base on which to base investigations of this critical factor.

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[6]Carlson, Richard O. <u>Adoption of Educational Innovations.</u> Eugene: Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, University of Oregon, 1965 (p. 63).

[7]Ibid., (p. 73).

[8]Orlosky, Donald and B. Othaniel Smith. "Educational Change: Origins and Characteristics" in <u>Kappan.</u> March, 1972 (pp. 412-413).

Central to the public's growing concern about professional educator competency is the view that the school principal is a key factor in initiating and managing change. And, while the nation has had professional preparation for school administrators for many years, it is apparent that a leadership crisis exists in this pivotal factor in school change.

Many research questions remain unanswered concerning dissemination. Questions related to State Departments of Education, central office personnel in school districts and school level personnel should include:

1. What alternative models of linkages among State Department of Education, school district, and R&D agency are workable? For each model, which R&D dissemination-diffusion functional roles are performed by the respective agencies? how?

2. What competencies, both new and existing, are identified by State Department of Education staff as needed for R&D dissemination-diffusion functions at the state level?

3. What alternative models of school district R&D product utilization are workable?

4. What competencies, both new and existing, are identified by school district staff as needed for R&D implementation at the district level? What training materials have demonstrated usefulness in assisting school district personnel to acquire these needed competencies? What other kinds of training programs are needed?

5. What alternative models of school level R&D product utilization are workable?

6. What competencies, both new and existing, are identified by school level staff as needed for R&D implementation at the building level? What training materials have demonstrated usefulness in assisting building level personnel to acquire these needed competencies? What other kinds of training programs are needed?

7. What factors inhibit and facilitate incorporating R&D products into practice at the state level? at the school district level? at the school level?

8. What are the relative advantages and disadvantages of involving a commercial agency to incorporate its products into practice at each of the various stages of the R&D cycle?

9. What alternative strategies can an R&D agency employ to incorporate products into practice?

We all know that the ultimate success of any educational product is the way it is used. Where a development ends, what role does the State Education Agency play, how does the district superintendent fit into the picture, and how does the local principal introduce and manage a new development contributes to its success or failure.

We also know that dissemination of an innovation is in itself a science. As much systematic effort is required to disseminate an innovation to schools as the innovation required in its initial development. Today we

are addressing ourselves to the technology of dissemination, its strategies, and the need to build relationships to implement them.

We have sought to develop, test and disseminate educational innovations which accommodate the individuality of both the student and the teacher in the classroom learning environment. To achieve this, we have adopted a strategy of providing to teachers and administrators, through staff development and support services, those skills, knowledges, and sensitivities which have not been acquired from pre-service education or from on-the-job experiences but which are essential to successful role performance.

Our strategy is based on the belief that there are certain kinds of generic skills that are distinctly different from the skills related to a specific innovation. These generic skills must be facilitated in educational agencies to achieve a better balance between traditional decision-making and the requirements for decisions in the adoption of valid innovations. A basic assumption is that significant educational improvement can result from improving the competencies of school district personnel in planning, managing and organizing schools for the introduction of educational innovations.

We are examining decision-making processes in both school districts and State Education Departments. This is being done through a major instrumentality - a Network of School Districts and State Education Departments. These institutions serve as the mechanism which we use to increase the knowledge about school district decision-making and the role of State Departments of Education. Central to this activity is the examination and specification of support services to the Network of School Districts in the form of personnel training, program monitoring and evaluation.

We have been concentrating on the development of a change capability which can initiate and sustain educational improvements from the district level to the building level. To accomplish the dissemination-installation of innovations and simultaneously develop a change capability, specific strategies have been utilized. These are:

1. establishment of criteria to insure commitment and understanding about R&D products as instructional systems,

2. development of training programs for school district central office personnel, administrators and teachers,

3. establishment of demonstration centers with national representation,

4. development of a data network and feedback system that permits the monitoring of schools in terms of the progress that students are making, assessing the degree of implementation, and collecting research data on strategies, procedures and roles, and

5. inclusion of state education agencies and the central office administrators in the development of a capability for introducing and maintaining the innovation.

1. Establishment of Criteria to Insure Commitment and Understanding

Specific criteria have been established to help achieve understanding on the part of the schools, school districts, and State Departments of Education. These criteria included:

- Administrative Commitment - A self-study on the part of local administration to gain first-hand knowledge about the essential elements of the innovation and understanding of the financial implications of each of these elements is the first step in meeting this criterion.

- Teacher Commitment - The teachers of any given school have the same right as the administration in investigating a new instructional system. Therefore, it is required that the faculty be involved in the basic decisions concerning the use of an innovation.

- Administrative and Teacher Retraining - Teachers and administrators must be aware of the new roles that this system demands. Furthermore, retraining is needed. The understanding of the training program must include the kind of training that is involved, the time needed, etc.

- Participation in Research - Both the teachers and the administration should know quite clearly the kinds of research questions that are being asked, the kinds of data that will be collected, the need for attitude surveys of both teachers and students, etc.

Once a school district has been accepted, it is expected to be able to:

- Prepare an initial plan for change which reflects: the pupil needs that justify the adoption of proposed curriculum products; a multi-year implementation schedule enumerating which products and school buildings are to be involved in each year; a discussion of the kind of pupil outcomes staff expect to attain; and a careful consideration of resource requirements for a multi-year period and suggested availability of these resources.

- Assess its training needs through the use of pre-assessment instruments.

- Design and schedule an administrator and teacher training program based on pre-assessment information and the role requirements of the curriculum products to be adopted.

- Prepare and implement an evaluation plan based on the kind of pupil outcomes staff expect to attain.

- Conduct the training program.

- Implement the curriculum products in school buildings.

- Monitor building and classroom operations to gain information that permits the staff in the building to achieve a classroom implementation model that is consistent with the kind of pupil outcomes the district seeks to attain.

- Summarize the evaluation results in terms of the kind of pupil outcomes the district sought to attain.

- Update the multi-year plan with a revised set of recommendations.

2. Development of Training Programs for School District Central Office Personnel, Administrators and Teachers

Training school district personnel to adopt and institutionalize innovations requires systematic strategies and products. These strategies lie outside the typical publisher consultants, teacher guides and university settings. As an integral part of the dissemination strategy, the training (or more accurately retraining) needs are of three basic levels: school district central office personnel, school administrators, and teachers.

The necessity of retraining school administrators was one of the first and most important things that we learned from our experiences in disseminating IPI. The school principal needs the competencies that are required to plan, manage, and implement curriculum products at the building level. More specifically, the areas of concern include organization aspects required by the innovation including: (1) the need for flexible scheduling of building activities and personnel, (2) the assessment of alternative staffing patterns to provide children with both professional and non-professional services, (3) communication skills in learning to work with the staff, (4) the tools to retrain the teachers, and most important, (5) how to be the instructional leader in the school.

3. Establishment of Demonstration Centers with Nationwide Representation

For any innovation to have real impact, broad-scale implementation in a variety of student populations is a necessity. We have established a Nationwide Network of School Districts in order to demonstrate to the educational community that individualization is a viable and practical strategy for teaching youngsters to be independent and self-directed learners. The assumption behind the establishment of the Network is that demonstration is an effective way to diffuse new educational programs to the greatest number of schools - and students - in the shortest amount of time.

Thus far, 80 elementary schools in 43 states have joined the Network, and many State Education Departments have indicated significant interest in the project. The goal is to build a network of 100 school

districts, at least two in each of the 50 states. Although we cannot financially support the Network schools, we are helping schools locate possible sources of funding so that they can participate in this effort to bring individualized learning into the classroom.

In addition to serving as demonstration sites for curriculum innovation and organization, Network schools also serve as training centers for teachers and administrators interested in bringing individualized learning programs to their school districts. Training materials and procedures have been devised and are available to Network schools. Also, a staff of developmental specialists regularly visits the schools and assists school staff in identifying and solving problems relative to the implementation of individualized programs.

4. Data Network and Feedback System

When our products enter the field test stage in the Network schools, they are evaluated with regard to adaptability, feasibility, effectiveness in achieving objectives, and cost efficiency. This feedback, which is continuous in nature, provides data on the effectiveness of product utilization, curriculum implementation, and school management problems. This assists in the redesign and revision of products and procedures.

Since the change in one element will affect all other elements, planning for a new program must consider all other aspects. By introducing one innovation at a time, the introduction and implementation is facilitated. Among the elements which must be considered are cost factors, time and management.

A second major area of feedback from dissemination schools is the area of quality control. The importance of maintaining the integrity of the innovation and the adoption model, should not be underestimated. If millions of dollars are spent in developing a product, responsibility for quality control should be undertaken.

In the past, many well publicized educational innovations, after attracting widespread interest, failed when implemented outside their initial settings. A major cause of this poor record of implementation has been an absence of detailed systematic specification for the control of the operation, coupled with a realistic method for monitoring and changing the implementation once it was operational in a given locale.

Two specific assessment instruments have been developed that help provide feedback on the degree of implementation that each instructional system has achieved.

The Consultant Diagnostic Instrument (CDI) which is the checklist for the consultant's use in periodic observations and reports on Network schools was designed to provide basic descriptive data concerning the degree of implementation for any particular subject to allow for evaluation comparisons across schools and to provide an index of degree of implementation for each school.

The second instrument developed for use by the local school principal is "Self Improvement Guidelines for New Schools." SIGNS has been designed to provide beginning schools with a means for the assessment of the degree to which recommended processes and practices are

used in an individual school. The checklist and form provided enable the administrator to make interpretable observations on various aspects of the innovation.

If the ultimate goal of product development is commercialization, then this aim must be incorporated into the dissemination strategy. As a specific element, the Network provides a natural facility for commercial products in terms of observation and training.

5. Inclusion of State Education Agencies and the Central Office Administrators

Schools do not select and implement innovations in isolation. They require the support of the local school district and State Education Agencies. Therefore, our strategy includes the establishment of a Network of School Districts involving state and local governments. With the involvement of State Departments of Education comes the legal authority to implement change and the necessary perspective in judging the needs of local schools and their potential for innovations.

The state agencies are interested in the statewide dissemination of new ideas and programs for schools. Developments such as the 1967 Amendments to ESEA, which strengthened the state role in promoting innovations, and the President's revenue-sharing plan are evidence of increasing need for greater state involvement in educational change. Structurally, no agency is in a better position to work for innovations than the State Education Agency. This agency has power which it must use prudently and with due recognizance of the American tradition of local autonomy in educational affairs. But the fact remains that local school districts derive their legal authority from the states.

Through state minimum foundation programs, local districts are largely financed. Through certification and accreditation programs, the states have a significant voice in the conduct of training of teachers and school administrators at all levels. In addition, the great inflow of federal money since ESEA has increased the influence of the State Education Agency.

Answers to the questions raised earlier will contribute to the knowledge base of dissemination of innovations. In conclusion, several facts that we do know about dissemination are worth repeating:

1. An innovation introduced in a particular school, in absence of a plan for diffusion, no matter how loudly acclaimed, is not likely to become widespread or to be permanently entrenched.

2. Whatever the form of the dissemination plan, it must feature people. People who can work with teachers, building administrators and central office staffs.

3. School Boards in local school districts will continue to have the final decision-making authority over the innovations introduced into local school systems.

4. Competing curricular and organizational options should continue to be available.

5. It is far more economical to construct a place for the commercial publishers in the change process than to try to duplicate their services and compete with them.

6. Local educators must be assisted in making informed decisions about the introduction of innovations. They cannot and will not do it otherwise. And, finally,

7. State Departments must be involved in the change mechanism at least in a supportive mode.